

MARRICKVILLE HERITAGE SOCIETY INC.

CAMPERDOWN DULWICH HILL ENMORE
NEWTOWN PETERSHAM STANMORE



LEWISHAM MARRICKVILLE ST PETERS
SYDENHAM & TEMPE

Celebrating 40 years

1984-2024

Our March meeting
Saturday 23 March 10.20 for 10.30 am sharp!
Cooks River walk with Ian Tyrrell

Where: Meet at the parking lot at Newtown Jets Tempe facility – off Holbeach Avenue, near the site of the old Cooks River Bowling Club, plenty of parking. From Tempe Station a 750m walk. The 422 bus southbound on Princes Highway stops at Fanning Street, a 5 minute walk to the Jets.

The walk: About 1.5 hours, easy, accessible and almost entirely flat. Optional add-on will be across the highway to Kendrick Park.

Facilities: Public toilets at the Holbeach Avenue meeting point and also in Kendrick Park.

Afterwards: The Clock On/Off Café is near the finishing point – good coffee and house baked options and they've agreed to extend their closing time for us if needed. Other nearby walkable options are Harry's Café de Wheels or Rovers on Cooks River, a licensed club.

Cost: Free

Bookings: We need to know numbers coming, so please contact **Mary** by phone on 0407 487 157 or message her – mary.oakenfull@bigpond.com. **Be sure to give Mary your phone number in case it's pouring rain on the day.**



Ian Tyrrell joined the committee of MHS in June 2023. He retired as Scientia Professor of History at the University of New South Wales in 2012 and is now an Emeritus Professor of History. Ian's teaching and research interests include American history, environmental history, and historiography.

His work is widely published, both in his own books, specific chapters for others, and international journal articles. This includes *River dreams: the people and landscape of the Cooks River* (2018).



Tempe marina with the reserve on the left and Cahill Park opposite. Photo c. 1928-29 (courtesy Mary Barthelemy)

Details: The walk includes: the Tempe Lands restoration project (site of the 1930s greyhound track and earlier firing range); the new 'Sydney Gateway' bridge construction over the Alexandra Canal; Shea's Creek/ Alexandra Canal reconstruction (including the inaccurate Sydney Water plaque) and Sydney Airport diversion; Tempe wetlands; the eroding 1890s banks at Tempe Basin; and, at the end and optional, across the highway to the Kendrick Park plaque misnomer, and to the Captain Cook Plaque.

A major issue that will be highlighted is the tension between continual use of the site as a transit route for all sorts of 'improvements' requiring the perpetual digging up and filling in of the area on the one hand, and the restoration of ecological and environmental sustainability on the other.

Part of the important Tempe Lands environment
(Photo: courtesy of savingourtrees.wordpress.com)

Our April meeting

Saturday 27 April 10 for 10.30 am
The Pavilion, Marrickville Library
Corner Marrickville & Livingstone Roads
Kathleen Muriel Butler, Confidential
Secretary to John Bradfield during the
building of the Sydney Harbour Bridge
A talk by Bill Phippen

The tunnel boring machine for the Metro railway under the harbour was named Kathleen. Few in Sydney now would know who Kathleen was, but in the early 1920s everyone knew **Kathleen Muriel Butler**, Confidential Secretary to John Bradfield during the building of the Sydney Harbour Bridge.

A remarkable young woman, the more so for her times, Butler played a vital role in the bridge construction both in Sydney and in London where she was sent to represent Bradfield and the NSW government in their dealings with Dorman Long and Co, the British contractors for the work.

On 20 November 2023 it was announced that a 'Blue Plaque' would be erected to mark the contribution of Kathleen Butler to New South Wales.



Kathleen Muriel Butler
(Source: British Women's Engineering Society, The Vote, 1924
British Newspaper Archive)

Civil engineer Bill Phippen OAM is a Fellow of the Institution of Engineers Australia and an active volunteer guide at the Australian National Maritime Museum.

His books include *The Hawkesbury River Railway Bridges* (2018) which received the 2019 Colin Crisp Award from Engineers Australia for documentation of engineering heritage and *By Muscle of Man & Horse – building the railway under Sydney 1916-1932* (2018); in relation to which he spoke to the Society in February 2023. His current research is the centenary of the Sydney Harbour Bridge whose construction began in 1922.

Our February meeting

Reds, Reformers & Ratbags: New Theatre's
radical past with Lyn Collingwood, Kim
Knuckey and Derek Cameron

In this multimedia presentation on Saturday 23 February we were provided with a whole other side of Sydney's history in the interwar period.

Lyn Collingwood and **Kim Knuckey**, two veteran Sydney actors, assisted by **Derek Cameron** on technical support, provided a range of stories, with matching accents, of colourful characters associated with the New Theatre.

Still active in its premises in lower King Street Newtown, the New Theatre is one of the oldest theatres in the country, and the oldest producing plays with a working-class perspective.



Derek Cameron, Kim Knuckey and Lyn Collingwood
(Photo: Lorraine Beach)

It began its life during the Depression as the Sydney Workers' Art Club (WAC) in August 1932 in Pitt Street, offering lectures, music recitals, art classes and exhibitions, and tuition in Russian, French and German. At a time when unemployment was 30%, it provided a range of support services for the unemployed.

However, its most popular activity was its dramatic section, a fact acknowledged by the later change of name to the New Theatre League, as it moved around in a range of inner-city venues before gaining its own building in Newtown in 1963. Our presentation outlined the origins of the WAC in the 1920s when left wing supporters, linked to the Industrial Workers of the World and the Australian Communist Party, began to form into groups influenced by events in Russia.

These supporters marched in the May Day marches where they were often in conflict with returned soldiers and other anti-communists. With little knowledge of what Russian life was really like, these left-wing groups began to put on plays idealising life under Communism and urging a similar class struggle in Australia.

By the early 1930s, when the WAC was formed, the large number of unemployed and widespread evictions of working classes from their homes made these issues more acute.

The WAC faced a constant dilemma, however, in whether to present only 'ideologically pure' plays, which were usually wooden and preaching to the converted, or to present a broader range of plays which would attract broader audiences.

Our presenters provided stories of a colourful and eccentric range of actors who performed in the 1930s, illustrated with pictures and cartoons. Most of these performers were without training or experience.

One particular story in this presentation stood out. The New Theatre, as it was called by 1936, was often in the forefront of opposition to fascism. In that year, it attempted to present the anti-fascist play 'Till the Day I Die', which attacked Nazi brutality. At the request of the German Consul, the government attempted to prevent the play being performed and police were sent to enforce this ruling.

However, this attempt at state repression backfired as audience demand ensured that the one-hour play was performed frequently, and sympathetic press coverage amplified the incident.

At the end, MHS members complimented Lyn, Kim and Derek on the lively and insightful way this little-known slice of Sydney history had been presented.

Tim McMullen

Special birthday greetings, Joy Lewis!



Photo source: Instagram

The most senior member of MHS, **Joy Lewis**, turned **105** recently. She celebrated the day with a low-key morning tea including delicious cupcakes.

Her grand nephew, member **Brett Johnson**, stated that his mother, Yvonne, Joy's niece, was also there to share the happy occasion with her aunt. Joy lives on the Central Coast's northern peninsula. Her birthday featured in the local newspaper (*Peninsula News*, 5 February 2024).

Joy's father was an elder at the Metropolitan Road Enmore (Methodist) church. Her mother was a well-known Marrickville elocutionist.

Congratulations to Joy and her family from everyone at MHS.

(In less happy news Brett drew Richard Blair's attention to the fiasco surrounding the closure of the Powerhouse Museum. See article on page 5.)

New books and events

New book by Judy O'Connor

War is not suitable for children is a selection of short stories by MHS member **Judith O'Connor**.

Diverse. Funny. Sad.

Snapshots of The Depression and Apartheid protests.

In one story a jealous young woman is trapped in remote bushland. Should she save her husband or let him die? An Irish wharfie juggles the moral dilemma between church and his beloved rugby union. And the 1940s crooner Bing Crosby features in a moment of closeness between father and daughter. Other stories tell of the fear and danger of being alone on

a remote snow-covered volcano; a confronting brush with the law; a conversation with a disinterested cat; a near-death experience and the whispered secrets of an old house.

Published by Ginninderra Press. Copies available via their website. Paperback, \$22.50.

Judy O'Connor was on the committee of MHS for a number of years. She has worked as a newspaper and magazine journalist and editor in Australia and overseas. She has published and contributed to several books and her short stories have won various awards and been published in anthologies. She lives in Sydney and is currently writing a novel set in Eveleigh railway workshops in the 1920s.



Chipilly Six

The author of *The Chipilly Six* (see January-February issue), **Lucas Jordan**, will be doing an 'in conversation' event at Marrickville Library, 6.30-7.30 pm, Tuesday 23 April. He'll be speaking with **Dr Darren Mitchell**, historian and former director of the Anzac Memorial, Hyde Park, about the *Chipilly Six*, in particular, Jack Hayes, Jerry Fuller and the Marrickville Anzac Memorial Club.

MHS members are more than welcome to attend.

Check Council's website for bookings.

Palace Street Petersham book

A reminder that Gerard Windsor's *Open house at the palace: an Australian street* will be launched at Petersham Bowlo on Saturday 13 April, 2-4 pm. Bookings through Humanitix. Note that the date in the hard copy of the last newsletter was later changed. Gerard will also talk about the book on Tuesday 30 April at 6.30 pm at Marrickville Library. Bookings via Eventbrite: check Council's website.

Vale: Alwyne Morgan

Member **Alwyne Morgan**, late of St Peters, died on 11 February 2024 aged 92. Alwyne was born in Hartlepool, County Durham and migrated to Australia in the 1950s. She worked in various administrative and secretarial roles in Sydney, Fiji and Tasmania before returning to Sydney in the 1960s. She then lived in Camden and worked in the Department of Veterinary Science at the University of Sydney's Camden Farms campus. She joined the local amateur theatrical group and was involved in the setting up of a residents' action group to campaign against a large development which would have had a negative impact on the heritage and environment of the Camden area.

She transferred to the main campus of the University of Sydney and worked in several departments including the Faculty of Economics, Department of Geography and the Power Institute of Fine Arts. She particularly enjoyed her time at the Power Institute as this allowed her to expand her knowledge of art history and appreciation of art in which she had a great interest.

She lived in Newtown near St Stephen's Church before moving to Camperdown and then to St Peters. Although not an active member of MHS she always maintained a keen interest in the history of the area and of current developments, particularly those which may have had a negative impact on the area, a hark back to her Camden days.



Alwyne Morgan
(Photo: Gail Donkin)

She was passionate about politics and while at the University of Sydney she was a committee member of the Clerical sub-branch of what was then known as the Health & Research Employees Association (now the Health Services Union of Australia). On her retirement she was given Life Membership of the H&REA for her services to the union.

Her retirement allowed her time to join a local theatre group which held fortnightly classes and travelled to London and New York on theatre trips. She also enjoyed trips to India, Egypt and Jordan as well as cruises in and around Europe.

Alwyne was an avid jazz lover and met her husband, Harry Crampton, at a jazz venue in The Rocks, Sydney. They would attend the annual Australian Jazz Convention held around Australia. Harry pre-deceased Alwyne many years ago but she continued to attend the convention for as long as she could. She was well cared for in her later years by members of her extended family, to whom we offer our condolences.

Jan O'Reilly

Good news for Lydham Hall, Rockdale



Photo source: Bayside Council Newsletter 9 Feb. 2024

Following the completion of renovations Bayside Council proudly re-opened historic Lydham Hall to the public on 4 February 2024. The renovations led to its closure for several years. Lydham Hall is one of the oldest homes in the St George area. The villa was built in the early 1860s for Joseph Davis and his family.

Its most famous resident, the author Christina Stead, spent her childhood there.

More details on proposed May visit in next newsletter.

Why did the Powerhouse Museum close?

Special feature by Richard Blair

In terms of heritage watch, Marrickville Heritage Society concerns itself mainly with matters relating to the former Marrickville LGA. However, sometimes our focus turns to broader issues and concerns and the recent closure of Sydney's Powerhouse Museum (PHM) in Ultimo is a case in point. The PHM, designed to preserve and honour the heritage of the people of Sydney, closed its doors on 4 February 2024 for a so-called 'temporary closure' until 2027 to undergo 'a major upgrade'. Community consultations were conducted for a short time but were discontinued on 25 February 2024.

Background

According to Wikipedia, from 1879, what became known as the Technological Museum opened in Harris Street, Ultimo and was very popular for a century. Its name later changed to The Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences (MAAS) then, 'on 23 August 1978, Premier **Neville Wran** announced that the decrepit Ultimo Power Station, several hundred metres north of the Harris Street site had been earmarked as the museum's new permanent home along with the adjoining former Ultimo Tram Depot.' Renamed the Powerhouse Museum, it opened on 10 March 1988.

Powerhouse Museum closes

In closing the PHM, the Powerhouse executive and the state government declared 'the museum building is outdated, run down and urgently needs repairs to protect the precious objects inside it from damage . . . The \$250 million "heritage revitalisation" will transform it into a superior, world-class museum.' (**Helena Burke**, ABC News, 4/2/24)

ABC News coverage (4/2/24)

The ABC News story went on to say, 'a conglomerate of hundreds of Powerhouse workers, museum experts and enthusiasts, union members, and local residents say the closure is premature and unnecessary. "The museum closure is completely unjustified," the Save the Powerhouse Campaign said. A petition calling for a delay to the museum's closure has attracted more than 5,000 signatures online.

'At the forefront of the backlash is the Powerhouse's founding director, **Lindsay Sharp**, who headed the institution for 10 years from the day it first opened in

1988. Dr Sharp, who also directed London's Science Museum for five years, said he doubted the Powerhouse would reopen in 2027 as promised, given the government has not released a refurbishment plan and the museum has been closed before planning approvals have been given, and a construction contract signed.

' "There's no plan. We cannot detect an engineering architectural renovation plan or an exhibit collection development plan," Dr Sharp said, "the museum should stay open to the public until a development application is approved and the second Powerhouse Museum is opened in Parramatta in 2025."

'It's expected to take several months for the government to complete a consultation process before a development application for the Ultimo museum can be approved.

'Supporting the government's decision NSW Arts Minister **John Graham** was quoted as stating, "The building has significant problems that must be addressed without further delay, including leaks from the roof and large cracks in several walls."

In response to this, opponents of the museum closure maintain that the pressing to completely close the building

for repairs is a phoney proposition. Some of the 'cracks' shown in photos of this 'urgent' repair work date from around 1905 and were consciously retained by **Lionel Glendenning** (the architect of the Wran Government era conversion) to bear witness to the building's history.

The ABC News report further states, 'Powerhouse chief executive **Lisa Havilah** said it was "critically important that precious objects in the museum be removed as quickly as possible to avoid damage from mould and damp. We don't want to continue to operate and compromise the collection," Ms Havilah said.

'Iconic objects that have sat inside the building for 35 years like the Catalina flying boat and the state's first train, Locomotive No. 1, will be relocated to the Powerhouse's Castle Hill storage site, which opens as a museum on weekends. The objects are expected to be moved back to Ultimo after the renovations are complete.'

Broken promises

A few days before the March 2023 state election, the shadow Arts Minister, John Graham, now the Minister, staged a press conference outside the museum to say that Labor would save the museum, keep it open and



Figure 1



Figure 2

release all the planning documents that the coalition government had kept secret. Labor has completely reneged on these commitments.

Displays at the PHM are in the process of being dismantled, the storage of collections is being moved to Castle Hill and the Harwood Building (formerly the Ultimo Tram Depot) is likely to be leased or sold to UTS and a monstrous tower built above it. Sydney and NSW are losing this historic museum of social history and science and technology. Meanwhile, the new centre at Parramatta, on a site that regularly floods, is not going to be a 'museum' in the commonly accepted meaning of the word: more of an arts entertainment centre with lots of cafes and restaurants. Meanwhile, it appears precious collection items are going to museums around the state, most of which don't have international-standard display conditions or professional curators.

How did this all come about?

When did state governments, firstly the Coalition and now Labor, and the Powerhouse board, get permission from the people of NSW to completely dismember the state's flagship museum of social and technological history in its award-winning revamped building blending industrial history and late 20th century adaptive re-use?

ABC News report (4/2/24): 'The state government said the next state budget would allocate \$250 million in expenditure to the Ultimo project over the next three years.'

Former PHM curator **Kylie Winkworth**, now representing the Powerhouse Museum Alliance, has been a strong opponent of the museum closure and is pessimistic about the future of the site. In a recent report by her (*City Hub Contributor*, 1/2/24), Kylie writes, 'The government has committed only \$119 million for the Powerhouse Museum over four years to 2026-27, not \$250 million. Where is the missing \$131 million coming from when it's not in the budget? It will likely be the sale of the museum's Harwood building.'

'The PHM will be closed for up to three years': Kylie claims this is not true either. 'The budget papers show a completion date of 2033. The government is hoping everyone will have forgotten what the real Powerhouse Museum was like if and when it reopens in 10 years'



Figure 3

time as a creative industries, arts and entertainment centre. That is the real plan, and this is why it is a secret.'

Kylie Winkworth goes on, 'There is no design brief, no master plan, no exhibition plan, and no museum plan, all of which would normally be in the public domain in any museum development project in the civilised world. A museum by definition is obligated to operate and communicate ethically, professionally and with the participation of communities. This might be why the 'museum' word has been dropped altogether. It's just "Powerhouse Ultimo" now.'

'Communities have been through multiple rounds of consultations since the PHM's sale and demolition was announced by former Premier **Mike Baird** in November 2014. Everything the community has said about keeping the Powerhouse Museum open, retaining the internationally significant live steam and transport exhibitions in situ, and retaining the Harwood building as an integral part of the museum's operations, has been ignored and misrepresented in multiple consultation reports.

CEO's disdain for consultation and concerning statistics



Figure 5

'The PHM's CEO Lisa Havilah has made no secret of her disdain for consultation. In her 2021 speech on "Undoing the Institution", she said, "I have never been a supporter of asking people what they want or community consultation." Her advice is to stop asking audiences. Institutions lead audiences, not the other way around. At the PHM this mantra

has delivered a 33% decrease in visitation since she was appointed five years ago, along with a 56% decline in education participation and a 188% increase in the dollar cost per visitor from \$32.28 to \$92.94. MAAS is the best funded cultural institution among comparable state and national museums but delivers the worst performance and lowest public impacts.

'The CEO's self-described "visionary new paradigm for the museum" is demonstrably an expensive failure. Exhibition costs are up 211% while audiences are down 33%. The only unambiguously popular exhibition at the PHM in the last five years was Leo Schofield's "1001 Remarkable Objects". Who knew audiences would come flooding back to the museum when it focussed on showing the collection? The exhibition was years in development, involved 120 people, and cost \$4 million in design and production. Now it is closing after just six months, wasting taxpayers' investment just to pack the collections off to storage, never to be seen for years. It's the museum equivalent of closing a Broadway hit musical in the



Figure 6

middle of the season when punters are clamouring for tickets and the backers haven't made a return on their investment.

'No one at the Powerhouse Museum's triumphant opening in 1988 could have imagined that only 35 years later the museum would be closed and stripped of its major exhibitions, its most significant collections scattered, and its

underpinning narrative and education purpose discarded like an old chip wrapper. A museum built with the highest quality infrastructure for a working life of more than 100 years will be gutted to the bare bricks. What the visionary Wran Government built over ten years of careful planning, integrated design and open communication, the current state government is sweeping away in haste and secrecy.

Political opportunism by governments on both sides

'What's happened to the Powerhouse Museum over the last nine years is a tale of political opportunism, waste, asset destruction, lies, broken promises and secretive lobbying to evict the museum from the valued property built and endowed by the Wran Government.

The breaking of the Powerhouse Museum began in 2014 as an asset grab and a property play, and this is how it is finishing. For the first time since 1893 there will be no museum in Ultimo, nor in the future. Everyone knows the PHM will never reopen in any recognisable form. After two governments promised to save the Powerhouse Museum, all trust is broken.

The public interest has come last

'Instead of saving the PHM the state government is rushing its pre-emptive closure for no credible reason. Instead of saving the museum it is wasting the legacy and investment of generations of NSW taxpayers. The public interest has come last in this cultural tragedy, along with the interest and trust of the museum's donors. The closure of Sydney's major heritage museum is a shameful cultural and tourism disaster for Sydney, a world first for all the wrong reasons.'

Reaction of MHS members

When MHS members became aware of some of the facts behind the closure of the Powerhouse, many expressed alarm in no uncertain fashion and sent submissions.

One member said 'People in general have been bamboozled by the contradictory series of obfuscations by successive governments, and so little is generally understood about what is happening (or not happening) with the Powerhouse. I admire tremendously the efforts of the 'Save the Powerhouse' activists, even though their efforts have clearly not yet had much effect. Their only parliamentary ally

seems to have been, surprisingly, Robert Borsak of the Shooters, Fishers and Farmers Party.'

What can members do?

Whilst it is too late to lodge a submission on the future of the Powerhouse (closing date 25 February) there's nothing to stop members from writing to Arts Minister John Graham, to the NSW Premier, or to your local state member. It is not unusual for election promises to be broken where there is good reason, but mistakes can be made and can be rectified. The Powerhouse Museum is about the conservation and interpretation of a particular history, mainly the early industrial history and its place in Sydney, especially Ultimo.

Exhibits from '1001 Remarkable Objects'

Figure 1: Cricket epergne, 1879. Figure 2: Hand-cranked petrol pump, USA, 1928. Figure 3: Coolgardie safe. Figure 4: 1930s poker machine. Figure 5: Timber model of self-supporting spiral staircase, A Meiklejohn, Newtown, NSW, 1903. Figure 6: 'Supreme' mouse trap making machine, Sydney c. 1944. All photos by Richard Blair.

Local heritage watch

A win for local residents in Dulwich Hill. The Macarthur Parade houses have been heritage listed. In what the Society hopes is a sign of good things to come, Inner West Councillors voted at their December meeting to heritage list the properties at 3 and 7-13 MacArthur Parade Dulwich Hill.

The Dulwich Hill Baptist Church and the four single-storey roughcast rendered Californian bungalows on the western side of Macarthur Parade between Marrickville Road and Beach Road, were all constructed between 1916 and 1925 and are important for their intactness, representative values and historical associations.

Of most local interest is that **John (Jack) Thomas Ness** lived for many years at 11 Macarthur Parade during his long career in politics as a Marrickville alderman, mayor and Member for Dulwich Hill in the NSW Parliament.

Interiors exempt.

In response to concerns raised by the owners of the properties,

Inner West Council

has decided to remove 'and interiors' from the wording of the heritage listings. Council will meet with the owners to advise the heritage listing incentives and what is possible with further development on these sites.

Controversy. The debate around the listing became one of the frontlines in the NIMBY (heritage) vs YIMBY (developer) battle that has broken out across Sydney in the wake of the housing affordability crisis and the state government's proposed Transport Corridor Rezoning proposals.

Scott MacArthur



11 Macarthur Parade
(courtesy domain.com.au)

We are off to a good start on the **website** this year with a regular stream of visitors looking us up and many seeking advice and assistance with researching all things Marrickville.

There are plans to write a few more stories this year, if you think you may have a great idea for one, please get in touch with the Webmaster – see Contacts.

You can also visit our **Facebook** page. Recent posts relate to last month's talk (see page 2) on the New Theatre at Newtown, the old Sydenham Theatre (now Bonds, ground floor; martial arts, upper level) and the Camperdown Park Rotunda, Camperdown.

Rod Aanensen

Autumn trivia question

This photo was taken in our local area over 100 years ago. Note how much vacant land there still was. Where is it?

Contact Richard 0413 335 897 or email MHS, marrickvilleheritagesociety@outlook.com.



By the way

You may notice that we have a new printer – details below. We sincerely thank World of Print, who for over 20 years printed our newsletter, and we welcome Digital Print Hub.

Also of note is our editor and all round Girl Friday, **Lorraine Beach**, is taking a six month sabbatical. From the middle of March she will be travelling the world and returning in September. Just in time for the 40th anniversary celebrations.

Safe and happy travels Lorraine!

Mary Barthelemy and **Richard Blair** will produce the newsletter during this time. Details below.

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Calendar of MHS Events

Saturday 23 March

Cooks River Walk

Guided by Ian Tyrrell

Details on front page

Saturday 23 April

Kathleen Muriel Butler, Confidential Secretary to John Bradfield

A talk with Bill Phippen

Details on page 2

Thursday 23 May (am)

Tour, Talk and Tea at Lydham Hall, Rockdale

Details in May-June Newsletter

Saturday 22 June

Annual General Meeting

The Society's AGM

Details in May-June Newsletter

Sunday 27 October

40th Anniversary Celebrations

Mark this date